

According to Hume (1876, *Stray Feathers* 4: 481) the bird is found in a zone between 7 and 30 miles offshore. Sinclair (1886, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 1: 168) included it among pre-monsoon strays and swept-ins but recorded no specimen actually taken on the coast. The first such record, from Marine Drive in Bombay, was reported by Novarro (1962, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 59: 649). The present specimen, found in good condition in vegetation 8 to 10 yards above high-water mark, is probably a bird that was washed ashore in an exhausted state. A sight record in February (Novarro, *ibid.*) is interesting as it suggests the possibility that the bird is commoner ashore than is generally realised.

—Eds.]

#### 6. NOTES ON INDIAN BIRDS 10—OCCURRENCE OF THE CHINESE GREY DUCK/SPOTBILL (*ANAS POECILORHYNCHA ZONORHYNCHA* SWINHOE) IN INDIA

In *Cheetal*, the journal of the Wild Life Preservation Society of India, for October 1964, Mr. M. J. S. Mackenzie of Balijan North Tea Estate, Chabua P.O., Assam, referred to Chinese Spotbill (*Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha* Swinhoe) as regularly found in Assam during the cold weather. Since the earlier records of this form were discarded in the FAUNA and the SYNOPSIS and the only evidence of its occurrence in India was believed to be the bird obtained by Inglis in Bihar (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 34: 810), I suggested a mistake in its identification.

Mr. Mackenzie promptly countered by shooting and sending to me two ducks which, from the specimens and literature available to me in Bombay, appeared to be *zonorhyncha* and this has been confirmed by Dr. Dillon Ripley. I also found these specimens to be identical with another shot by Parsons at Pasighat, Sadiya Frontier, Assam, and noted by Stuart Baker (*op. cit.*, 39: 638) as intermediate between *zonorhyncha* and *haringtoni* [from Burma with a green speculum—H. A.]. His note however went on to say that the latter had a purple-blue, speculum<sup>1</sup>. This prompted me to make a more careful examination of the earlier records with the following results:

In 1904 (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 15: 718) Stuart Baker said that he and, earlier, Moore and Mandy had shot several *zonorhyncha* out of a flock of about 40 birds on Sirsi Bheel in Dibrugarh in the extreme east of Assam, and repeated the statement in the first (1908) edition of INDIAN DUCKS AND THEIR ALLIES. In the latter, he discredited Oates's recently described *haringtoni* from Burma, holding that they were only

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<sup>1</sup>This statement appears to be due to some oversight. The error was corrected in the *errata* list at page xviii of Vol. 39, Nos. 3-4 of the *Journal*.—Eds.

immature birds in which the red spots at the base of the bill had not yet developed.

In 1913 (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 22: 806) he agreed that *haringtoni* was separable and classed the east Assam birds as of this race. This was repeated in the second (1921) edition of INDIAN DUCKS, and in the FAUNA, where Inglis's specimen from Bihar, referred to earlier, was said to be the only record of *zonorhyncha* from India.

In 1931 J. C. Higgins (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 35: 460), seeing Inglis's note and having access only to the first edition of INDIAN DUCKS, drew attention to the earlier records of *zonorhyncha* and said he had seen and shot them himself in Assam. Inglis (*op. cit.* 35: 687) replied that the earlier records were of *haringtoni* 'a quite different bird with a blue and not green speculum'. Higgins (*op. cit.* 36: 266) drew attention to this error in colour, but Inglis neither offered an explanation nor admitted an error. Later Higgins repeated his earlier records (*op. cit.* 36: 421) and referred (*op. cit.* 37: 224) to two more *zonorhyncha* shot on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.

In all this confusion one can only guess that, when accepting *haringtoni* as a valid race from Burma, Stuart Baker made the mistake of assuming, without examination, that the earlier records of *zonorhyncha* from Assam were all in error for this form. That these Assam birds were not *haringtoni* is endorsed by the fact that Oates, when describing this race specifically referred to two specimens from Assam 'recently acquired for my collection and recorded in the Society's Journal as *zonorhyncha*'.

From the material and literature available in Bombay, *zonorhyncha* is distinguished from the typical race by:

(a) the absence of red spots at the base of the bill (a character shared with *haringtoni*, at least at certain seasons or stages),

(b) the lower portion of the underparts being more or less uniformly brown, and not spotted,

(c) the absence of the white bar on the secondaries above the speculum,

(d) the speculum being purple-blue and not green. Regarding the colour of the speculum it must be noted that, though the speculum of typical *poecilorhyncha* from peninsular and western India is green and at the same angle outstandingly different from the purple-blue in *zonorhyncha*, these colours change and replace each other at different angles and it is possible to get a purple-blue effect in the greenest speculum, and *vice versa*. From the limited number available for examination, it also appears that this tendency to turn from one to the other increases as one approaches an intermediate area and is most prominent in specimens of *poecilorhyncha* from Assam and in *haringtoni* from Burma, though both can be accepted as green.

(e) a dark line formed by speckles extending from the base of the bill towards the ear-coverts. This character is shared with at least three races of *Anas superciliosa* (vide Delacour's THE WATERFOWL OF THE WORLD 2 : 62) but does not occur in *poecilorhyncha*.

The westernmost record of *zonorhyncha* is still Inglis's from Bihar, which is now at the Yale University, and whose identity is confirmed by Dr. Ripley. But there is also no doubt that the earlier records from Assam were correct and there was no need to discard them.

The number of mistakes that have dogged the descriptions and accounts of this species is indeed remarkable—even the colleague whose birds Stuart Baker first identified as *zonorhyncha* has had his name written as Mandy, Mondy, and Mundy in the notes referred to above !

However there can now be no doubt that *A. p. zonorhyncha*, The Chinese Grey Duck, is a fairly regular winter visitor to eastern Assam, and once strayed as far west as Darbhanga in Bihar.

75, ABDUL REHMAN STREET,  
BOMBAY-3,  
June 7, 1966

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

## 7. THE PINKHEADED DUCK [*RHODONESSA CARYOPHYLLACEA* (LATHAM)] AGAIN

(With a plate)

This is to inform the Bombay Natural History Society that, in the year 1947 on the 27th January in the afternoon, I shot a Pinkheaded Duck [*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* (Latham)] at Manroopa Lake in Khagaria subdivision, Dist. Monghyr, in my Estate area known as Bahadurpur Estate. The said duck, six in number, took off from Manroopa jheel and came over me and I shot only one. Sir Hugh Dow, Governor of Bihar, and Mr. E. O. Lee, I.C.S., Member of the Board of Revenue, Bihar, were in the shoot. The latter gave me a letter of testimony which read that the Pinkheaded Duck is rarely found in India and he congratulated me, but this letter is misplaced at present.

Again in 1948-49 I saw some Pinkheaded Duck on the Lake Manroopa, about 5 to 8 of them, but they did not come over me so I could not shoot.

SHAKARPURA RAJ,  
P.O. SHAKARPURA RAJ,  
DISTRICT MONGHYR, BIHAR,  
January 18, 1965.

LALITESHWAR PRASAD SINGH